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Marie-Claude Maurel

Central European Geography and the Post-Socialist Transformation. A Western Point of View

Geography, like other social sciences, has the task of analyzing the rapid and large-scale transformations that societies and territories in Central Europe have been going through since the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989. The changes, which are spreading on various spatial scales, affect the new geopolitical map of the whole region as well as leading to the reorientation of movements and the emergence of new territorial dynamics. The changes not only modify spatial configurations. As questions of ethnic, cultural, and national identities return in strength, changes also touch the relationship of ethnic groups and peoples to the territory. The geographer's duty is not simply to observe and analyze the geographical patterns of the post-socialist transformation, it is also to understand how social and spatial changes are linked on the road "from socialism to capitalism".

Are geographers in a position to meet this cognitive challenge? Under what conditions and with what skills do they tackle this new developmental stage of their discipline? What methodologies and theories do they need in order to explain spatial changes happening in the transition countries? These questions require going back to the specific situation of the discipline during the communist time before considering how geographers tried to adapt to the new institutional context and to new requirements. Through the past decade, the transformation of the discipline seems to proceed largely from the renewal of research topics more than from institutional reshaping. It also comes within the scope of an international policy of opening up.

1. Central European geography before 1989

The subordinate place of human geography

The study of geography partially avoided the constraints limiting most of the social sciences. It could do so because it belonged to both the natural sciences and the social sciences. On the epistemological level, this situation carries a lot of implications, which sparked heated debates, especially among Soviet geographers (Maurel, 1985). It is not necessary to go back over this controversial question; we ought to emphasize the role of this epistemological break in the positioning of the discipline in the scientific research system. Divided into two branches, physical geography and human geography, geographical knowledge was segmented into subdisciplines closely defined by their subject of research. During the socialist period, the development of the discipline was characterized by the predominant place given to physical geography. In most of the socialist countries, geography was one of the earth sciences. As a result, contacts with social sciences were quite rare, if they existed at all. Geographers took advantage of this situation, which offered them a degree of protection from the influence of Marxism-Leninism and from the most extreme forms of ideological control. When this control became very restrictive, geographers found refuge in the studies of physical geography (Dragomirescu, 2001).

In several countries in Central Europe, human geography studies were restricted to an inventory of the various fields of economic and human activities, without worrying about their spatial interactions. In their most complete version, these studies led to the achievement of a national atlas. Their framework was invariably based on the same content: some plates describing the natural environmental features and some maps depicting population distribution, the location of various economic activities, mainly industries, and communication networks. The list of the data missing from the atlases of the socialist countries included activities related to defense and

security installations, to transportation and communication nodes, and to everything that could be considered a “strategic objective”. Under no circumstances should scientific output be permitted to provide information to the external enemy!

The contributions of Central European geographers to science were usually restricted to the study of their own country. Apart from very rare attempts carried out in the context of bilateral exchanges, such as the Polish-Hungarian seminars organized between the geographical institutes of the two countries’ Academies of Sciences, comparative approaches remained almost nonexistent. Limitations in linguistic ability are not the only explanatory factor. In a more fundamental way, geographers were reluctant to undertake research on countries other than their own. This situation resulted from their position of subordination to a state administration that intended, through the activity plans of each institution, to define the priority study topics. Research carried out in the narrow context of the nation state lacked comparisons and objectivity. It tended to overestimate the potentials and performances of each country and to smooth out, not to say to conceal, the problems of uneven territorial development. Ideological control and censorship, which were exerted in varying degrees in different countries, made it impossible to mention any weakness in the social or economic report on the country concerned.

Within academic institutions, research in “applied geography” depended mainly on territorial planning organizations that functioned directly under Party and state control. Closely subordinated to the objectives of economic planning, territorial planning did not give rise to an independent scientific output from the academic world. However, during the 1980s, regional studies were significantly renewed in two countries, Hungary and Poland. This innovative current developed in relation to the attempt to reform the politico-administrative system at the local and regional levels.

In Budapest, at György Enyedi’s initiative, some human geographers pulled away from the Geographical Institute of the Academy of Sciences, dominated by physical geographers, to create a “Center for Regional Studies” with an original network structure for a multidisciplinary conception. The “Center for Regional Studies” intended to develop studies of territorial development and environmental issues. Political leaders called for its expert evaluation on both the national and regional levels. This evolution fits into the context of the reform movement that foreshadowed the change of system in Hungary.

In Poland, a vast program of studies of local and regional development called “Regional Development – Local Development – Territorial Self-Government” was launched within the framework of the Institute of Spatial Economics of the University of Warsaw during the years 1985-1990. Some two hundred researchers from a dozen scientific centers took part in the program, whose results were published in Polish, English, and French (Kuklinski and Jalowiecki, 1990).

These Hungarian and Polish Research Centers, constantly in close touch with their counterparts in Western Europe, contributed to the diffusion of new approaches and to the acquisition of abilities that would prove useful after the change of political system.

The uneven international opening up of Central European geographies

The quality of research conducted by Central European geographers during the socialist era differed from one country to another. Polish geographers played a predominant role because of their number and because of the influence of their works: “Research in Poland is not only very prolific, but it is also generally more wide-ranging in systematic coverage and method, more accessible to the outside world, more deeply probing of current reality, and more questioning of established ideologies than are most studies in other countries of the region.” (Hamilton, 1990)

Polish geographers came from a long and brilliant tradition, but it could not account for everything. Polish geographers’ opening up to the Western world and their self-assertive presence in international scientific institutions allowed them to keep in touch with the most innovative research centers in Western Europe and North America. After the events of 1956, scientific exchange was never interrupted, with the exception of a few months after the implementation of

martial law in 1981. The 1980s experienced an intense development of exchange with French universities and the National Center of Scientific Research in the context of institutional partnerships. Some joint French-Polish teams were able to carry out comparative field research, for example in the context of the Languedoc-Mazowsze project, which brought the Universities of Warsaw and Montpellier together (Savey, 1992).

In a way more limited because of a smaller workforce, Hungarian geographers also contributed to the development of scientific exchange with the West, mainly with Anglo-American geography. Important scientists like Jerzy Kostrowicki in Poland and György Enyedi in Hungary won international recognition, which brought them the support of their respective Academies of Sciences. They regularly took part in the work of the International Geographical Union (IGU), and they chaired some of the most productive commissions of that body. Thanks to their authority and influence, they contributed to saving, at least partially, the study of geography in their countries from the worst effects of Soviet leadership.

Because of the unequal degree of openness to the Anglo-American, German, and French academic worlds, geography in Central European countries was in very disparate situations on the eve of the 1989 turning point. If the Hungarian and Polish geographers, well-integrated in international scientific competition, showed dynamism and a continuous renewal of topics and methods, Czechoslovakian and Romanian geographers, inward-looking in their traditional national schools and deprived of freedom of expression by more coercive regimes, revealed serious shortfalls.

2. Central European geography after the 1989 turnaround

A more pluralistic discipline

By loosening the constraints that limited the development of the social sciences, the communist regimes' collapse paved the way for their revival. The new situation has benefited human geography by gradually reinstating it among the social sciences. The extent of renewal depends on the previous developmental conditions. The rebirth of human geography seems the most dramatic in the Czech Republic and to a lesser extent in Romania. In countries where human geography was underdeveloped, some well-known scientists got involved in the restructuring work. In Poland and Hungary, geography continues its development in the directions previously defined and pays more attention to the question of regional development. In a few years, a readjustment has taken place in favor of human geography, and scientific approaches appear to be more diversified. The international opening up has led to the development of scientific cooperation and a broader diffusion of publications.

However, in most of these countries, research and higher education are still split. Geographical institutes belonging to the Academies of Sciences are not particularly renowned for their great ability to perform innovative work. Universities show a broader receptivity to change and try to reorganize their structures and to introduce new teachings. Among the most significant advancements is the reorganization of geography at Charles University in Prague. If geography still belongs to the Faculty of Natural Sciences, close to earth sciences, it now puts a lot of emphasis on social and political issues within the Department of Social Geography and Regional Development run by Petr Dostal and Martin Hampl. It has become the most important Department of Geography, thanks to the size of its staff and to the quality of its publications. The transformation is less evident at the Comenius University in Bratislava, where the Departments of Geography still belong to the Faculty of Natural Sciences and focus on the four following subjects: "Cartography, Geoinformatics, and Remote Sensing", "Human Geography and Demography", "Physical Geography", and "Regional Geography, Protection, and Planning of the Landscape".

At the University of Warsaw, geomorphology, climatology, and hydrology are well developed within the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies. The very dynamic "European Institute for Regional and Local Development" (EUROREG), which conducts comparative studies of regional and local development, remains a distinct institution. Among the new subdisciplines that appeared after 1989, some deal with subjects that were taboo before, like political geography and financial geography. The latter specialization is well covered in Hungary, where "the ever-greater interest in the geography of finances is justified by the booming growth in financial services and information technology" (Gal, 2000).

In most Central European universities, cartography is devoted to the development of new techniques: remote sensing and geographical information systems, and geoinformatics. Those new techniques tend to become autonomous, as appears to be the case at Charles University in Prague and at the Department of Cartography of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Geoinformatics may constitute a separate discipline without trying to establish much connection with the other fields of geography.

Geography remains everywhere a fundamentally academic discipline whose development includes the creation or the expansion of higher education centers in reply to training requirements. Thus, in Romania, six new universities have been added to the three already existing in Bucharest, Iasi, and Cluj, and new reviews have been created.

Reconnecting East and West

By allowing the free movement of ideas and people, the opening to the outside world promoted the reintegration of Central European geographers in the international scientific community. With its commissions and study groups, the International Geographic Union (IGU) set up the right framework to establish contacts and scientific networking. Reconnecting Eastern and Western geographies furthers two different aims: Western geographers' deep interest in post-communist transformation analysis, and Central European researchers' wishes to re-establish close ties with Western geographic schools and to test out new methods. A few commissions and study groups played a particularly active role in the transfer of concepts and methodologies. Central European geographers were full members of commissions on the Organization of Industrial Space, the Geography of Population, Urban Development and Urban Life, the World Political Map, and the Geography of Public Administration. Through their activities, these commissions brought new approaches to young geographers who had earlier been excluded from international scientific exchange.

Among the commissions that played key roles, we would like to emphasize the "Geography of Public Administration" commission, first chaired by the British geographer Robert Bennett, then by the Canadian geographer Max Barlow. Among its main objectives, the Commission sought to encourage research on administrative developments in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. Just before the fall of the communist regimes, two meetings organized in Poland and in Hungary were especially important in emphasizing the re-emergence of local self-government in Central Europe (Bennett, 1989). During the 1990s, the Commission attached significant importance to the re-establishment of local self-government in Central and Eastern Europe, thereby contributing to the post-1989 transformation (Dostal, Illner, Kara, and Barlow, 1992; Maurel, 1993; Bennett, 1994).

The IGU Conference in Prague in August 1994 was the setting for reconnecting Central European geographies. Focused on "Environment and Quality of Life in Central Europe: Problems of Transitions", it regrouped a thousand participants from 69 countries. Organized by Charles University thanks to Secretary General Tomas Kucera, this conference gave Czech and Slovak geographers the opportunity to set out their scientific production to colleagues from all over Europe and beyond. This major event put an end to the long isolation that had seriously affected these countries. The book *Central Europe after the Fall of the Iron Curtain*, which collected the most significant contributions of Central European and Western European geographers, was one of

the signs that a new scientific community interested in the study of the post-socialist transformation was appearing (Carter, Jordan, and Rey, 1996).

The reintegration of Central European geographers in international scientific competition essentially took place in the context of bilateral academic exchanges, some of them supported by European Institutions. For example, the project "European Space – Baltic Space – Polish Space" was developed as part of a perfect cooperation between the Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung of Hannover and the European Institute for Regional and Local Development of the University of Warsaw (Kuklinski, 1997). Many French universities keep up regular links with their Polish, Czech, and Romanian counterparts in the form of regular student and professor exchanges. Developing comparative research and fieldwork studies, geographers participate in a very active way. Some remarkable achievements deserve to be mentioned. For example, French-Romanian cooperation led to the preparation of an atlas of Romania then published in two versions, French and Romanian (Rey, 2001).

The range of scientific output (reviews, books, atlas) reveals the deep interest of Central European geographers in the analysis of the post-1989 transformation. The scientific reviews "Geoforum" and "Geojournal" dedicated several issues to the analysis of spatial changes and transformations taking place in Central Europe. They systematically called for papers from these countries' geographers. The improved quality of some geographical reviews published in Central Europe is striking, especially the well known review "Geographica Polonica", which is published in English.

However, a decade of transition has only slightly affected the institutional structures of Central European geography. The replacement of important scientists seems extremely slow. Over the last few years, some leaders have died and few young geographers have emerged. The same specialist names appear in the academic publications. Topics and contents provide better evidence of whether Central European geographers have showed a real receptivity to the changes that took place in their countries.

3. A progressive renewal of topics

Researchers in the social sciences saw in the political and economic upheavals the opportunity to renew topics and conceptual approaches. The analysis of the post-socialist transformation has become a new research field. None of the concerned disciplines had at its disposal a theoretical framework allowing it to comprehend the process of transformation in its entirety and complexity. A transfer of concepts and methods was necessary. Some disciplines – economics, and political science for example – adopted a theoretical framework based on other experiments of political or economic transitions. Thinking through the shift from socialism to capitalism also meant assessing the historical context of Central European countries. Few researchers in social sciences were able to initiate a theoretical approach as fruitful as that of the Hungarian economist János Kornai. There is nothing comparable in the field of geography, in which studies predominantly empirical provide only a fragmentary outline of the observed transformations.

How did geographers position themselves toward the analysis of the post-socialist transformation? Most of them considered the spatial changes as one dimension of a transformation process that originated in the political and economic fields. However, two specific questions can be asked:

1. What effect would the inherited spatial structures exert on the transformation process? The hypothesis that communism's mark on space would hinder the transformation was quite widely shared. So the burden of the communist period's legacy deserved special attention.
2. At what pace would the spatial changes take place? Many geographers were convinced that the changes of spatial structures would turn out to be slower and less visible than the political, economic, and social changes. So the asynchronous nature of spatial changes was expected to slow the transformation process.

The spatial heritage

Spatial structures proceed from history. Long-term settlement distribution trends and the belated spread of the industrial revolution had left a lasting mark on space organization (urban networks, unequal regional development, etc.). During the communist period, socialist industrial patterns (priority given to heavy industries concentrated in large cities), collective agricultural forms, and a spoiled environment deeply changed the organization of space. Landscapes retain the communist legacy's mark: spatial patterns of industrial activities, the location of public facilities, communication networks, and settlement distribution. None of these components would be removed from one day to the next. From the start, geographers tried to assess the inertial effect that spatial patterns peculiar to the socialist system were likely to exert on the transformation process. In the context of a research project on the future of "Eastern and Central Europe 2000" the question was formulated: "Do the new factors of development follow the traditional spatial patterns of particular countries or do they – and will they – change these patterns? (...) Does the shift from socialism to capitalism dramatically change the spatial heritage of the Central European countries?" (Gorzelak, Jalowiecki, Kuklinski, and Zienkowski, 1994).

The notion of spatial heritage can be understood in an even broader sense. Other heritages are present in people's minds. They are related to forms of economic appropriation, to symbolic and political representations of space, and to territorial identities that were formed during the forty years of the communist regime. In various ways, the communist power intervened in the territories' "memory of time": attempts were made to remove the effects of population transfers and boundaries changes imposed just after World War Two, pseudo-national territories (especially in states with a federal organization) were recognized, and administrative units and territorial tiers were reshaped as part of political system reforms. These political manipulations of territorial landmarks had various effects that were difficult to foresee. Their potential to provoke claims makes them a source of political tensions, especially on the level of interstate relations.

New spatial dynamics

From 1990 on, geographers put forward the hypothesis that geopolitical and economic changes would introduce a new and strong differentiation of territories. In the context of neoliberal economic theory, spatial changes were generally analyzed as the expression of the market's differentiating effect. From the moment transition economies came back to a market coordination mode, Central European territories found themselves suddenly exposed to the effects of globalization (Eneyedi, 2000). The political and economic opening therefore entailed integration in the globalization process.

In his analysis of territorial changes in the Czech Republic, Michal Illner quite rightly points out the role of such global and long-term processes as modernization, metropolitanization, and globalization, which had been delayed by the constraints established by the communist regime (Illner, 2001).

The differences in the pace of the implementation of reforms have meant strongly differentiated regional processes. Transition is improving faster in the territories most qualified to fit in the new context, those opening to international exchange and foreign investments, that are economically restructuring, and where trade is booming. Market forces' effect on places and regional spaces is all the harder, because the state no longer intervenes to redistribute financial resources in favor of the weakest ones.

Several geographers referred to the notion of regional or local "potential" to express the idea that the answer to socio-economic changes depended on a set of conditions or properties peculiar to each place or each region (Gorzelak, 1998). The systemic economic change and the new geopolitical order altered factors defining geographical potential. A location, a resource, a patrimony might see their value growing stronger or weaker and thus contributing to revalue or devalue regional potential. The relative positions of places and territories change: the effect of proximity can be either favorable or unfavorable. Some regions keep their position, while the

positions that other regions possessed in the former socialist system have changed. Transformation is taking place on different tracks. Across the relative positions of regions in the planned economy and then in the post-socialist transformation, a typology of regional tracks can be distinguished: positive continuity, positive discontinuity, negative discontinuity, and negative continuity (Horvath, 1999).

Regional differentiations: West-East asymmetry

With the geopolitical opening and the reorientation of exchange and traffic with the West, countries and regions in contact with the European Union member countries found their situations greatly improved. People tended to see geographical proximity with developed areas as a factor explaining the greater growth of Western regions compared with Eastern regions close to countries of the former Soviet Union (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova), which suffered from their “dead end” location. This explanation could seem a little limited if the new geopolitical order does not overcome older disparities of development. Here we should recall the temporal lags that left their mark on “the long history” of the Central European space. The West-East “gradient of modernity” is the consequence of a temporal lag in the spatial diffusion of innovations, of the development of industrial activities, and of urbanization. The question is the extent to which visible regional divides are the products solely of the reactivation of old and long-standing inequalities.

The model of West-East asymmetry seems pertinent to the current disparities of development, both on the supranational level of Central and Eastern Europe and on the macro-regional scale in each of the countries: Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and, less obviously, the Czech Republic (Gorzela, 1996).

Let's take the well-known case of Poland. The present territory bears the long-standing mark of an old asymmetry hardened by the historical partitions of this country. In the same way, the former German border, historically stable until 1945, can be spotted on maps of development levels. The duality affecting the Polish territory affects not only the material legacies fixed in the context of spatial patterns or in infrastructures, but also other structural features of civil society, such as electoral behavior, the results of local governments, and the various dynamics of associative networks. Grzegorz Gorzelak and Bohdan Jalowiecki put forward the hypothesis that the West-East gradient would affect social actors' behaviors, their receptivity to change, and their degree of activism. They predicted that the administrative units (*gmina*) of the western and northern territories as well as those of Great Poland would exhibit a broader social mobilization and a more developed sense of innovation and of entrepreneurship than the administrative units of the old Galicia or of the former “Congress Poland”. In the territories acquired in 1945 and resettled by Polish populations coming from the former eastern territories, the migratory mingling would have contributed to renewal and strengthened the ability to adapt (Gorzela, 1998).

If a long-standing West-East asymmetry seems to convincingly explain the regional contrasts in development, we should hesitate to apply this hypothesis too generally. We should not claim that the western regions of Central European countries close to the border of European Union member states almost automatically enjoy a “border effect” beneficial to economic activities. In a study published in 2001, Michal Illner admits that the scenario concerning Bohemia he had worked out in 1993 probably overestimated the West-East gradient, and that many border areas in the Czech Republic do not appear very dynamic (Gorzela, Ehrlich, Faltan, and Illner, 2001). This assessment can be applied to Polish regions close to the German border. After a few years, the outcomes of some “Euro regions” located along this border seem a little disappointing.

Cross-border relations

Cross-border cooperation is another topic very present in recent research by Central European geographers. It is generally presented as a factor of regional development and as the beneficial result of the borders' opening and of the easy crossing made possible by geopolitical change. Encouraged by European Union regional policy and financial support, the “Euro region” model

seems to have met with some success. However its implementation can lead to reservations when the territorial claims between peoples and neighboring states are not completely subdued. In addition, the disagreements that have cropped up about ecological risks (nuclear plants, hydraulic constructions, etc.) disclose deeper-rooted political tensions.

The question of cross-border relations appears more complex and invites geographers to look more closely and precisely at the accessibility of the crossing points, the terms of contacts between the populations, and the goods and services exchanged on both sides of the border. Such an approach was developed for Hungary (Rechnitzer, 1999; 2001). This country has no fewer than seven different neighbors on an 1800-kilometer border, and the situation of the border regions seems more and more differentiated after a decade of changes. Only the regions next to Austria and Slovenia experienced successful development. When Hungarian territories on the “periphery” (in the economic sense of the word) border other peripheral regions (western Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania), cross-border cooperation is hampered by the similarity of the problems experienced (excess of labor in comparison with job opportunities, absence of capital to develop resources, etc.). On the other hand, in the South of the Great Hungarian Plain, contacts with Serbia, focused on the cities of Szeged and Baja, grew as part of a “gray economy” active in time of war. The new geography of borders and cross-border relations, seen in the context of the European continent, thus offers geographers an advantageous field of study.

The post-socialist urban transition

The major cities and especially those that were capitals had the best new conditions for a market economy. As points of receipt, diffusion of innovation, and attraction for foreign investments, their economic structures recorded the fastest transformations, both in privatization and in the growth of service. The author of a recent study of the transition of Hungary’s regional system maintains that in Budapest the old structures gave way to new ones and that in this city the transition is now complete (Rechnitzer, 2000). The same could be said about other capitals of Central Europe – Prague and Warsaw – which are the transition’s most advanced points of diffusion on the scale of their respective territories.

Many studies have been devoted to the analysis of the characteristics of post-socialist transformation in cities, particularly those on the upper levels of the urban hierarchy. Geographers have tried to draw up a model of the urban transition from “state-controlled socialism” to “global capitalism” that would account for the complexity of the processes as well as the tendencies of the functional and structural reorganization of urban space (Kovacs, Sailer-Fliege, 1997). New functioning conditions of the labor and housing markets, which result from market coordination, account for the spatial structures’ changes in the process of transition. These topics triggered many analyses of large cities and capitals in particular (Rykiel, 1999; Weclawowicz, 2000). A new urban order is taking shape with active processes of polarization and segregation.

Conclusion

Transition countries have very specific historical tracks, so the forms that spatial structure changes take are hard to read. Spatial structures are reorganizing themselves, combining rearrangements of inherited organizational forms with genuinely new forms. This offers geographers a field of study with new research subjects and new conceptual approaches. We are not able to draw a complete overview of this. Central European geographers analyzed the labor market trends, particularly unemployment, residential population mobility, industrial sector restructuring, and the decollectivization process in rural areas. Comparative studies are still too rare to be able to establish a global theoretical approach to spatial transformation. However, some research went beyond the too-limited national framework and too-narrow disciplinary approach. In a comparative and prospective view, some social science researchers tried to develop a diagnosis and some scenarios to foresee changes under way (Gorzela, Ehrlich, Faltan, and Illner, 1994). With the hindsight of seven years, they are reworking and updating their analyses. The hypotheses

put forward in their first works were generally confirmed by facts (Gorzelak, Ehrlich, Faltan, and Illner, 2001). Not all the studies recently published have the same scope or the same methodological interest.

The geography of post-socialist transformation is constantly evolving. The transformation process leads to a rearrangement of spatial structure by modifying the relative positions of places and regions. Let's not forget that during this process, territories are increasingly differentiating, development directions are diverging, and the economic gap between the two sets of poles (capital/countryside and West/East) is widening. Transition is moving forward at unequal speeds. This is not due to a mere delayed ignition that penalizes this or that region, but to the effects of a crisis of the destruction of old organizational forms (mining and industrial complexes, collective farms, etc.), a crisis whose depth and duration depend on place and regional space.

These rearrangements have not yet consolidated and are likely to change; regional structures are moving closer to and further away from each other, disclosing the uncertain futures of "the spaces of the transition" (Rechnitzer, 2000). The process seems largely spontaneous. Resulting from the free effect of economic forces, it is not yet controlled or alleviated by regional policy measures. Through the past decade, governments' primary attention was not given to regional development. The establishment of democratic institutions in different tiers of the territorial system absorbed all efforts, whereas the lack of budget resources limited the possibilities of regional development support. The question of regional development clearly emerges in connection with the prospect of European integration.

One Hungarian researcher states that "the future of the spatial structure of Hungary basically depends on the decentralization strategy that Hungary will apply in the use of the new resources available after EU accession" (Horvath, 1998). This prospect involves setting up real development strategies if we wish to avoid seeing some territories sink into unemployment, poverty, and a "gray economy". It is also the researcher's responsibility to highlight the problems that have arisen from a liberal conception of transition, which can endanger the cohesion of Central European societies.

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